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ABSTRACT

Ocean County College (OCC) has had a long-standing commitment to serving all those who might benefit from higher education. One of its efforts to serve the disabled is its Telecollege Program for Confined Adults, which began in fall 1978. Through the program, homebound students select and schedule courses through a counselor, who also arranges for the transport of instructional materials and proctoring of exams. Once registered for a course, the homebound student dials a conference telephone at the beginning of each class period, enabling him/her to participate fully in class. For faculty members, the Telecollege Program requires an extra commitment, which may extend to altering lectures, developing special assignments, and arranging after class telephone discussions. For Telecollege students, who are generally young adults partially or totally paralyzed through accident or degenerative disease, the courses permit the use of their unimpaired intellectual resources toward the goal of a college degree. Although the Telecourse Program has made possible 4,710 hours of instruction which would otherwise have been inaccessible, not all college courses are adaptable to the Telecollege format. One of the most difficult obstacles confronting disabled students, many of whom are physically unable to write and in many cases unprepared for college-level composition, had been the English composition requirement. Two courses were developed to meet the special needs of these students: Communications for Motor-Impaired Students, which contained modules in listening, composing, speaking, and reading; and Literature for Motor-Impaired Students, which contained modules in the short story, the novel, and poetry. A final dimension to OCC's service to the disabled is provided through the Home Study curriculum of television, radio, or newspaper courses. Through these programs, OCC has shown that a little money and a lot of concern can go a long way in expanding educational opportunities for the disabled. (EJV)

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ADAPTING TO DIVERSITY

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"Adapting To Diversity"

A resounding crash was heard in the 70's as educational barriers for the handicapped fell under the impetus of mainstreaming legislation. Not until the 80's, however, did this new population arrive in significant numbers on college campuses. The diverse needs of physically disabled students required that the colleges adapt not only buildings and grounds but, more significantly, attitudes and curricula. In retrospect, legislation concerning the former provided clearcut guidelines for easier implementation. However, academic adjustments have been more difficult as colleges strive to comply with the law, maintain consistent standards, and provide support for faculty previously inexperienced in working with the disabled--all in the face of diminished economic resources.

Higher education had long accepted a certain moral obligation to the handicapped. However, the combination of disabled Viet Nam veterans seeking to use education benefits, mainstreaming legislation, and the emergence of the community colleges made wheelchairs and specially adapted vans a more common sight on campus by the mid-seventies.

Like other community colleges, Ocean County College in Toms River, N.J., had recognized its mission to serve all who might benefit from higher education. Thus recent legislation has only accelerated

Ocean County College's efforts to serve the disabled. In fact, by 1978 Ocean County College had begun a more concerted effort to offer courses not only to disabled students capable of getting to the campus, but also to the homebound. A Title I project coordinated through Jersey City State College provided sufficient funds for a number of two- and four-year institutions in the state to establish Telecollege programs. Through the use of the student's standard telephone and a classroom with special wiring and a conference phone, Telecollege permits homebound students to enroll and participate in on-campus classes.

Ocean County College's Telecollege Program for Confined Adults began modestly in Fall 1978. Six classrooms in the Instructional Building were wired and the first four Telecollege students enrolled in a total of five courses. Initially the Title I grant provided total funding for the project. A subsequent mini-grant permitted the wiring of additional classrooms and purchase of conference telephone equipment. Eventually a 1982 grant from the Ocean County College Foundation, a philanthropic group comprised of community organizations and individual citizens who give financial support for educational projects at the college, enabled completion of any wiring planned to date. Suitable classrooms are now available in the Instructional, Nursing Arts, Physical Education, Fine Arts, and Planetarium Buildings. The only recurring cost of the program is the monthly leasing charge for telephone lines. Associate Dean of Instruction Dr. James McGinty has coordinated the technical aspects of Telecollege since its inception.

Homebound students select and schedule courses through counselor Nancy Polonitza. Potential barriers arising from the need to arrange for transporting materials and proctoring exams are surmounted through her efforts and faculty cooperation. Once registered for a course, the homebound student is given a telephone number to call at the beginning of each class period. The conference telephone rings in the classroom and, with the pushing of a single button, the student is placed in the classroom as a full participant, able to ask questions and make comments audible to classmates. The exchange of materials such as handouts and copies of course notes is handled by a volunteer network of class members, representatives of student service organizations, college staff, and social service personnel.

Despite the extra commitment required of a faculty member working with homebound students, many instructors welcome the experience. Additional faculty efforts may extend to altering lectures, explaining visual material, developing special assignments and evaluations, and arranging after-class telephone and personal discussions. A serendipitous effect of the program is to reduce the isolation of confined students. Some Telecollege students have exchanged phone numbers with each other. Also when transportation, health, and weather permit, they will attend a session on campus to meet their classmates.

Most Telecollege students are young adults partially or totally paralyzed through a catastrophic accident or degenerative disease. The courses allow them to use their unimpaired intellectual resources toward

the goal of a college degree. Occasionally the program has assisted a "regular" student who is temporarily confined to a hospital or at home as a result of an accident or illness.

Ocean County College has been fortunate that its commitment to postsecondary education for the handicapped has been shared by the Garden State Rehabilitation Center of Toms River. Many Telecollege students have resided at the Center, whose Social Services Department has provided support for any of its residents ready and able to undertake college courses. These services have included securing and training volunteers to assist with course materials and providing equipment for audio visual support for the instruction.

True to its humble beginning, Telecollege continues to operate on a modest scale. About twenty-five students have participated in the program, with an average of five students per semester using this service. Program participants have earned a total of 314 credits at Ocean County College; while this number may seen small to those for whom physical restrictions have not limited access to educational opportunities, it represents 4710 hours of instruction which would have otherwise been inaccessible.

In Spring 1983 Janice Kroll, severely disabled as a result of multiple sclerosis, became Ocean County College's first Telecollege graduate. Janice was wheeled to the platform to accept her diploma from college President, Dr. Milton Shaw. She planned to share the proud moment with Madolyn Cappell, her devoted volunteer from the College's Office of Business and Finance. Ironically, on graduation night Madolyn experienced not only pride but empathy, as she

herself viewed the ceremony from a wheelchair after having broken her ankle. Telecollege's second graduate is Sherman Talley, who completed his coursework in Fall 1984. Sherman's disability resulted from a spinal cord injury received during a high school football game. Both Janice and Sherman reside at the Garden State Rehabilitation Center.

Not all college courses are adaptable to Telecollege format. Mathematics courses requiring visual interaction in the classroom, laboratory sciences entailing experimentation, and courses teaching physical skills are difficult to offer over the telephone. Most curricula have sufficient flexibility to allow substitutions in a problem area. Frequently faculty permit Telecollege students to take independent study courses suited to their needs.

One of the most difficult obstacles confronting disabled students at Ocean County College had been the English composition requirement present in all curricula. Most Telecollege students and even the handicapped attending classes on campus were physically unable to write. Their present skills and instructional needs were difficult to evaluate because earlier school progress had suffered frequent interruptions. Often they were assigned to a developmental class which, in the early years of these courses on a college campus, had become a disposal site for students with a wide variety of problems--poor skills, little motivation, learning disabilities, second-language backgrounds, and physical handicaps. Utlimately it was this last group who seemed to be receiving the least appropriate treatment through their

placement in a developmental writing course.

The nurturing environment of the developmental course notwithstanding, the instruction was not appropriate to the students. They were being taught specific writing skills they could not expect to use, while they certainly had unique but neglected composing needs. The additional problem of determining an equitable grade had never been resolved satisfactorily. The graded writings of all other students were completed in class; the disabled, however, dictated their assignments to an amanuensis, leaving instructors uncertain of whose spelling, punctuation, and proofreading were being evaluated. Furthermore, these students were actually doing oral composition without benefit of any instruction in appropriate techniques. Finally, the disabled had to contend with certain setbacks which sometimes interfered with progress in a course tied to a fifteen-week syllabus. A minor cold could be life threatening to a student with muscular dystrophy, and two inches of snow would keep a wheelchair student housebound for several days.

It became apparent that students physically unable to write needed a communications course to meet their special needs and yet fulfill Ocean County College's graduation requirements. Dr. Judith Longo of the Humanities Department had worked with disabled students in the English curriculum for several years. In 1981 she was awarded a grant from the Ocean County College Foundation to create a six semester-hour communications and literature sequence for these students. A portion

of the grant permitted completion of the Telecollege Program cited earlier, but the major funding provided for research, development, and purchase of essential materials.

In Fall 1982 the first of the two courses, ENG. 131 Communications for Motor-Impaired Students, was complete. The standard first semester English course these students had taken previously focused exclusively on writing, but thorough preparation in communication requires practice in the expressive skills of writing and speaking and the receptive skills of reading and listening. Because this audience could not rely on writing for self-expression and storing information, they needed far greater training in the three remaining communication skills. ENG. 131, therefore, was designed to be offered as independent study with a flexible time frame so that occasional setbacks would not prevent completion of the course.

The course contained four modules: Listening, a series of exercises designed to foster active listening skills and presented first so the work could be applied throughout the program; Composing, adaptation of basic rhetorical techniques to oral composition; Speaking, application of the instruction in oral composition to semi-structured speech situations with a strong emphasis on vocabulary building; and Reading, a special focus on the reading skills these students must develop in place of the notetaking and outlining most others use when they read. Students required only the Study Guide and some supplementary taped material, both prepared by Dr. Longo. They completed the exercises through dictation

into a cassette recorder, so the only assistance needed was a volunteer to handle the recorder or turn pages if they were unable to do these things for themselves.

In Spring 1983 the second course, ENG.132 Literature for Motor-Impaired Students, was ready. This course contained three modules: The Short Story, The Novel and Poetry. The main problems posed by literature courses are unfamiliar vocabulary words which cannot be readily checked in a dictionary without a volunteer standing by, and the need to know in advance what elements to focus on because the student cannot flip back and forth through a story to verify details. The Study Guide prepared for this course identified in advance unfamiliar words, provided focus questions prior to the readings, and explained before each selection the particular literary element (e.g., plot, setting, theme, etc.) which was significant. Taped or telephone lectures on the backgrounds of the authors were available; students taped responses to comprehension and discussion questions for instructor evaluation.

A few years prior to the availability of these specialized English courses, Ocean County College had begun to offer Home Study, complete college-level courses delivered in a unique fashion, usually by public or cable television, radio, or newspaper. Students whose personal circumstances preclude their attending traditional campus classes often prefer the "packaged" Home Study courses featuring limited on-campus discussion meetings and the use of a Testing Center. Home Study, also

under the direction of Dr. McGinty, has added another dimension to the educational opportunities offered to the disabled.

Each semester some eight to ten different courses are available through the Home Study format, with approximately twenty-five different selections having been offered to date. Although an option for all students, these courses require little adaptation for the handicapped. Long-range assignments and detailed study guides are a standard feature of Home Study; thus the student who must rely on a volunteer for assistance is assured of reasonable flexibility. Choices are by no means restrictive, with recent offerings ranging from astronomy (Dr. Carl Sagan's Cosmos) to Zen (The Long Search, a course on the history of religion). A comprehensive selection is available from business, humanities, and social science areas in particular. The New Literacy, a course on information processing and computers, provides an introduction to the field from which these students can anticipate the most dramatic developments in meeting their communication needs.

Disabled students look to new information technology as their avenue of access to education at all levels. The materials, systems, tools, and techniques of microelectronics and telecommunications promise the ability to adapt to the demands of each unique disability. However, as academic institutions struggle with shrinking resources and expanding public expectations, it is unrealistic to anticipate that sufficient funds will be available for large-scale implementation of costly technological advances. The lack of a single broad market or

strong user network, the variations of each disability, poor communication between inadequately funded projects, and costly technology mitigate against widespread academic adaptations of many innovations.

In the meantime, and in accordance with the community college mission, Ocean County College has shown that a little money and a lot of concern can go a long way in expanding educational opportunities for the disabled.